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SERMON CCXXVIII.

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RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

MATTHEW V. 25, 26. *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

OUR Lord, in the preceding verses, enjoins it upon the man who had injured his christian brother, to go and be reconciled to him immediately, before he presumed to go to the altar of God, and there offer his gift. From this controversy between man and man, he makes a natural transition to the controversy between man and God, and directs the sinner to agree with his offended Maker quickly, while in the way of reconciliation with him, lest he should lose the precious opportunity of obtaining his favor, and fall under his just and everlasting displeasure. The text, without any further comment, obviously contains this serious and interesting truth:—

That sinners must perish for ever, unless they become reconciled to God, their adversary, while he is in the way of reconciliation with them.

I. I shall show, what is implied in God's being an adversary to sinners.

II. Show what is implied in God's being in the way of reconciliation with them. And,

III. Show that if they refuse to be reconciled to him, while he is in the way with them, they must perish for ever.

I. What is implied in God's being an adversary to sinners.

Adversary, signifies one who is an opposer, an antagonist, an enemy. In this sense it is used in the text, to denote that God is at variance with sinners, has a controversy with them, and is alienated in his heart from them. This, however, does not mean, that he feels any such thing as malevolence towards them; for he is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; God feels truly benevolent to the evil and unthankful, to the disobedient and most incorrigible sinners. But his being an adversary to them implies, that he is really *displeased* with them. His benevolence hates their selfishness; his holiness hates their sinfulness. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin, without the utmost abhorrence and detestation. His infinite love to holiness creates an infinite aversion to unholiness. He is angry with the wicked every day, and his wrath continually abides upon them, when they lie down, and when they rise; when they go out, and when they come in; when they tread his courts, and when they neglect to attend them; and all the while they live to themselves, instead of living to him. He knows, that every imagination of the thoughts of their heart is evil, only evil, and that continually. He knows that all their affections are alienated from him, and all their actions are so many transgressions of his holy law. It is, therefore, morally impossible for him not to be displeased with them, while their hearts and lives are thus full of evil. And now his holy displeasure at sinners necessarily makes him their adversary, and sets him against them. How often does he say to the sinner, "I am against thee?" He says this no less than twelve times in the prophets. This is an awful declaration! It implies not only that the heart of God is against sinners, but that all his perfections are against them. His benevolence, his goodness, his justice, and his omnipotence, are all arrayed against them. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand; I lift my hand to heaven and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me." Such a holy, just, and omnipotent adversary is God to sinners; who not only hates them, but, if they continue

impenitent, will assuredly punish them as long as he and they exist. But yet,

II. He is in the way of reconciliation with them ; which implies,

1. That he proposes terms upon which he is willing to be reconciled to them. And the terms he proposes are extremely gracious and condescending. He requires nothing more on their part, in order to a reconciliation, than that they should love him, whom they have hated without a cause, and return to him, from whom they have unreasonably revolted, in the way he has appointed. He has appointed his Son to be a Mediator between him and them. And as Mediator, he has suffered and died in their room, and made complete atonement for their sins ; so that God can, through the medium of his Son, become reconciled to them, as soon as they renounce their enmity, "accept the punishment of their iniquity," and cordially embrace the divine Redeemer. It was great condescension and grace in God to take the first step towards a reconciliation, by removing an insurmountable obstacle in the way of it, by giving the Son of his love, to suffer and die on the cross, to open the door of mercy ; and it is great grace in God, after this, to propose a reconciliation upon the terms of the gospel. But he does graciously tender to sinners, pardon and salvation upon the terms of love, repentance, and faith. He says to them, "I love them that love me ; and they that seek me early shall find me." "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Incline your ear, and come unto me ; hear, and your soul shall live. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Here God proposes to be reconciled to sinners, and invites them to accept his gracious proposals. He treats them more kindly than they treat one another. *They* insist, that the offender ought first to propose terms of reconciliation to the offended, and not the offended to the offender. But God makes the first advance towards a reconciliation with sinners, and proposes the most reasonable terms ; which demonstrates, that he is more ready to be reconciled to them, than they are to him. He is in the way of reconciliation with *them*, while they are fleeing from *him*.

2. God not only proposes terms of reconciliation to sinners, but waits upon them to accept his gracious proposals. They ought to agree with their adversary quickly, while he is in the way of reconciliation with them; but being averse to a reconciliation, they are extremely prone to refuse and neglect to comply with his gracious proposals. Instead of returning to God, they love to wander from him; and instead of accepting his terms of mercy, they obstinately reject them, for which they deserve to be denied any further invitations. But God still waits to be gracious to them, and exercises great patience and forbearance towards them. He had rather they would accept than reject his offers; he had rather save, than destroy them. This he solemnly declares in his word, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man." Agreeably to these merciful declarations, God has exercised astonishing patience towards sinners in every age of the world; nor has his forbearance yet failed. He is this day waiting upon thousands and millions of delaying sinners, who have, for many years, refused to hear and accept the terms of salvation. So long as God thus continues to propose terms of mercy to sinners, and waits upon them to accept his terms, he is certainly in the way of reconciliation with them. His long patience and forbearance towards them, are plain and infallible tokens of his sincere desire to be reconciled to them. His conduct perfectly harmonizes with his declarations.

3. God not only proposes terms of reconciliation to sinners, and waits upon them to accept the terms he proposes, but he uses a variety of means to induce them to become reconciled to him. He has appointed and authorized an order of men to carry on a treaty of reconciliation with mankind, and directed them to exhibit the most solemn and weighty motives before the minds of his revolted subjects, to acquaint themselves with him and be at peace. Hence, says the apostle, "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though

God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." When a prince not only proposes terms of reconciliation to his rebellious subjects, but also sends one ambassador after another, to beseech and persuade them, by the most powerful motives, to become reconciled to him, he gives the most convincing evidence that he sincerely desires to bring about a mutual reconciliation, that he may forgive and save them from deserved punishment.

But besides his speaking to sinners by his ambassadors, who employ the words of reconciliation, God speaks to them by his providence, which has a voice which they are constrained to hear, and a meaning, which they are constrained to understand and feel. This is a method which he employs after all other means of reconciliation have failed. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" And again he says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." Invitations of mercy and scenes of prosperity often harden the hearts of sinners, but afflictions have a more powerful tendency to melt and soften their hearts. These melted and softened the heart of the obdurate Manasseh. God often melts, and softens, and purifies the hardest hearts in the furnace of affliction, whilst he is in the way of reconciliation with sinners. In a word, he leaves no proper methods unemployed to bring them to a cordial reconciliation upon the terms of the gospel. I now proceed to show,

III. That those who refuse to become reconciled to God, while he is in the way with them, must for ever perish. This will clearly appear, if we consider,

1. That the day of grace and reconciliation will close with the close of life. Life is the only accepted time and day of salvation. It is only in this world that God is in the way of reconciliation with sinners. He will wait no longer than this life lasts, to be gracious to them. As soon as they cease to live, they will cease to be prisoners of hope. Christ exhorts the sinner in the text to agree with his adversary quickly, lest his delay should prove fatal. In the parable of the ten virgins, he taught delaying sinners, that the door of mercy will, ere long, be shut against them. In the parable of the talents, he taught slothful, delaying sinners, that the close of life will put a final period to all opportunities of doing and getting good. And in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he taught both saints and sinners, that death will close their probationary state, cause a final separation between them, and fix them in an unalterable condition. If this be true, the

inevitable consequence must be, that those who neglect and refuse to comply with the offers of the gospel, through life, must perish for ever.

2. The Scriptures abound with the most plain and solemn declarations, that the finally impenitent and incorrigible shall be punished for ever. God declares, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." God says to sinners, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." Christ plainly and abundantly taught the certainty and perpetuity of the future punishment of the wicked. He said, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." At another time he said, "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." He commanded his apostles to proclaim to the whole world, "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This will certainly be the doom of the finally impenitent; for Christ, the final Judge, has expressly declared, that in the great and last day, he will gather all nations before him; that he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; that he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left; and that then he will say to them on his left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." Thus "Christ will be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting de-

struction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

But since these, and all other mere declarations concerning the future punishment of the finally impenitent, may be, and have been, criticised and explained away, by those who wish to pervert the gospel, it seems necessary to observe once more,

3. That the inflexible justice of God *requires* him to punish his incorrigible and irreconcilable enemies without ceasing and without end. This our Savior asserts in the text. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Christ considers all mankind as debtors, and their sins as debts, and therefore directs them to pray to God every day, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Impenitent sinners are under obligation to receive the due reward of their deeds at the hands of God; and this obligation they can never discharge by suffering, because suffering has no tendency to diminish their guilt, and desert of punishment. And since then, those who are once cast into the prison of darkness, can never pay the debt of punishment, which they owe to divine justice, their chains will never be taken off, nor they set at liberty, and restored to the divine favor, and the enjoyment of heaven; for Christ, who will pass judgment upon them, has forbidden them to be liberated until they shall have paid the utmost farthing;—which it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they should ever pay. The same immutable justice of God, which requires him to punish the finally impenitent at all, equally requires him to punish them as long as they deserve punishment, which will be for ever; and the same wise and benevolent purposes, which can be answered by their temporary punishment, can be equally answered by their eternal punishment. Indeed, there is not a single objection that can be made against the wisdom and justice of God, in punishing the finally impenitent for ever, which cannot be made, with equal force against his wisdom and justice in punishing them at all in this world. Accordingly, the apostle Peter infers the future and eternal punishment of the ungodly, from the punishments which have actually been inflicted upon sinners in this world. Speaking of those who, in his day, brought in and propagated damnable heresies, he says, "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered

them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ENSAMPLE unto those that after should live ungodly; the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the *unjust* unto the day of judgment to be *punished*.⁷ All the natural evils, calamities, and punishments that ever have been inflicted upon mankind in this world, are so many evidences, that God will punish the finally impenitent *for ever* in the world to come. For those, who do not become reconciled to God upon the terms of the gospel, while he is in the way with them, will for ever remain irreconcilable enemies, and manifestly deserve the tokens of God's everlasting displeasure; and his immutable justice will require him to give them the due and everlasting reward of their deeds. Their punishment will be as lasting as their ill desert, and this ill desert will be as lasting as their existence, which will never end.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God be in the way of reconciliation with sinners; then those who do not realize this, are awfully stupid. This is the case with all who do not realize, that God is their adversary, and yet disposed to be reconciled to them.
2. If God is in the way of reconciliation with sinners; then those are very *unwise*, who continue to displease him. There are many who are so unwise. They take occasion from his terms of mercy, his patience, and his providence,—to disregard all he says to them, and does for them.—This is very unwise.
3. If God is in the way of reconciliation with sinners; then those are very obstinate, who complain of the terms, which he proposes,—these are as reasonable and accommodating as possible.—They have injured God, but God has never injured them.
4. If God is in the way of reconciliation with sinners, upon reasonable and gracious terms; then those are very presumptuous, who propose their own terms to God.—Many are so presumptuous. They insist, that God shall return to them first, and assure them, that he never will cast them into hell.
5. If God is in the way of reconciliation with sinners; then it is their immediate duty to be reconciled to him; the terms are perfectly reasonable, practicable, and may be withdrawn any day.

6. If God be in the way of reconciliation with sinners; then his treatment of them in this world, will completely justify his treatment of them in the next—in the eyes of all heaven, in the eyes of all the damned, in their own eyes.

7. This subject calls upon all to enquire seriously, whether they have become reconciled to God. Sinners, have you ever realized that he is your adversary? Have you become reconciled to him? Have you been reconciled upon his own terms? Have you chosen his terms rather than any other?

8. This subject shows the dangerous state of sinners—Life and death are set before them—the terms are proposed—God is waiting—but his patience may soon end—can your hands be strong, and your hearts endure, when he shall deal with you as incorrigible enemies?

SINNERS, the voice of God regard;

His mercy speaks to-day;

He calls you by his sov'reign word,

From sin's destructive way.

Like the rough sea that cannot rest,

You live devoid of peace:

A thousand stings within your breast,

Deprive your souls of ease.

Your way is dark, and leads to hell;

Why will you persevere?

Can you in endless torments dwell,

Shut up in black despair?

SERMON CCXXIX.

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THE PROPRIETY AND DESIGN OF AN ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THANKSGIVING.

LEVITICUS xxiii. 39. *Also in the fifteenth day of the month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord, seven days.*

THE text forms a part of the directions given for the observance of the feast of tabernacles. Among the Jews, this was a very important and interesting festival. It was to be observed once in a year, and was significant of their gratitude to God for common and for more special blessings. In this chapter, we have an account of various feasts or festivals, which were designed to remind them of their dependance and of their obligations to their common Parent, the Giver of all good. Of these, the principal were the passover, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles. The two latter had a more special reference to temporal blessings, and seem to have been instituted as commemorative of the divine goodness in ordering the seasons of the year, and thus amply providing for the subsistence, convenience and comfort of his dependant creatures.

The direction given in the text has reference to such a festival. "When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord." We shall consider,

I. The propriety of such a festival, and

II. What is implied in the text in regard to the manner in which it should be observed. It is a festival of thanksgiving, and has respect to particular circumstances specified. The term festival is significant of joy and gladness, and is applied to those observances, which, by divine appointment, were designed to commemorate particular and signal manifestations of the divine goodness. They were joyful occasions, rendered so by the tokens of heaven's favor to those who were called upon to share in the duties enjoined. In this festival of thanksgiving, there is a remembrance of God's goodness in relation to a specified

object,—viz., the gathering in the fruit of the land. The propriety of observing such a festival will appear,

1. From a view of man's dependance.

Man is a dependant being. Of himself, he can do nothing, and unsupported by a higher power, he cannot exist a single moment. That he should feel, acknowledge and recognize his dependance upon that higher power, is connected with the exercise of such feelings, and the cultivation of such affections, as are most becoming an accountable being. Whatever tends to awaken and keep alive such feelings, must be regarded as most desirable; especially when we recur to the fact, that there is in man such a proneness to forget God, his Creator and Benefactor, and practically at least to adopt the language, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." That such a festival as this is calculated to produce this effect, appears probable from the fact, that it calls our attention to the subject. It reminds us of what we might not otherwise be so likely to bear in remembrance. It brings the great subject of our dependance directly before the mind, and is calculated at least to awaken some consideration upon the interesting relations which we sustain in the present state of our being. It is not that man is laid under any stronger obligations of gratitude at this particular season, than he is at other times in view of the same blessings; but that by a special and public recognition of his dependance and of the divine goodness, he may express before men, his sense of obligation resting upon him, and use it as an occasion for exciting higher exercises of gratitude and joy.

2. The propriety of such a festival seems evident from the *magnitude of the blessings, which furnish the occasion of its observance*. It is in commemoration of that power and goodness, by which the earth is caused to yield her increase. It is when ye have *gathered in the fruit of the land*. It is with reference to the continuance of those means, by which the existence of man is prolonged. Unless the providences of God are so ordered that the fruit of the land may be gathered in, what is man? What would be the condition of his race unblessed with food and raiment, and the more exalted individual and social blessings, which cannot be enjoyed without the subordinate means by which life is upheld, and its comforts multiplied? We at once perceive that the occasion is peculiarly interesting, inasmuch as it tells of the loving-kindness and tender mercy, without which, the condition of man would be dreary, and desolate and sad beyond whatever we have experienced, and beyond what we may ever have conceived.

We are apt to lose sight of the value and magnitude of these bless-

ings of a common providence, from the fact that they *are* common. But we may suppose the case reversed. Consider mankind toiling in the cultivation of the earth, and the earth refusing to yield her increase, the enriching showers withheld, and the fields, instead of being clothed with the exuberant fullness of their productions, doomed for a single year to barrenness. What a different aspect would be spread over the face of society! What desolation of these domestic endearments and comforts,—what sorrows of heart and what sadness of countenance would take the place of the cheerful countenances, and joyful hearts, and fireside enjoyments, and social privileges, which now, at every step, speak forth the beneficence and the tender-mercy of Him who crowneth the year with his goodness. And is there not ever something in our condition, in the circumstances which attend our lives, or in the seasons of the year, calculated to remind us, that for these common blessings we are wholly dependant; that the tenure upon which we hold them is the mere good pleasure of Him, who has power to turn the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood,—to cause the stars to fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven to be shaken, and all the tribes of the earth to mourn? Sometimes His righteous sovereignty is displayed in withholding the sunshine in harvest, and in permitting the mildew and the flood to disappoint the hopes of the husbandman, and to remind us of our daily dependance upon His merciful providence. In some instances, the desolating flood is permitted to sweep over the fertile field, and to lay waste the promising fruits of human industry; and the plenteous showers have descended in the time of harvest, presenting obstacles in the way of a safe ingathering of the fruits which industry, with the divine blessing, had reared. Again, while sometimes refreshing showers are withheld, and we look upon the fading and withering aspect of the vegetable kingdom around us, we cannot but feel our own impotency in causing the grass to grow for cattle, and the herb for the service of man. Easily might He, who is infinite in power, have shut up the windows of heaven till this moment; easily might He have sent blasting, and mildew, and sterility, so that the earth would not have yielded her accustomed fruits, or when brought forth, they would have been rendered useless.

But how does He ever deal with us?—not only better than are our deserts, and often better than our fears. “All eyes wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season.” And this ample provision, made for the subsistence of man and beast, has an important bearing upon all those higher sources of enjoyment, which render life most valuable and desirable. The civilization and refinement, the social

pleasures and social privileges, the means and the efforts of benevolence, are all directly promoted by the blessing which brings to man a full and competent supply of his temporal wants. The magnitude of the blessing appears the more conspicuous, when we consider it as forming the basis, upon which is reared the fair superstructure of every well-ordered and happy society. So that when, through the divine munificence, the fruit of the land has been gathered in, it is highly proper that a festival of thanksgiving should be observed.

3. Such a festival is proper on account of its social character. Mankind are not only dependant, but are alike dependant upon the same Being. They owe to Him the same obligations. And here is a subject in which they have a common interest. The public observance of such a festival is calculated to cement the bonds of union and good fellowship between man and man, while they are brought together to rejoice in the same thing, to recognize the same wise and gracious Providence, and to give thanks for the same benefits. Here they are led unitedly, and in their social character, to contemplate the divine munificence in which all share a part, and to fix their thoughts upon the loving-kindness of Him, in whom every man lives, and moves, and has his being. Such is the practical benefit of those institutions and observances which bring before the minds of men their common obligations to their common Parent,—which, by reminding them of their entire dependance upon the same Almighty Being, lead them to think of their mutual dependance upon each other, and the mutual obligations which rest upon them. The direct tendency of such a public observance, is to awaken kindred feelings in bosoms where kindred feelings ought to reign. And it is designed to awaken those higher sensibilities towards the Giver of all good, without which, man grovels like the beasts that perish, and sinks in brutal debasement, while he ought to be rising in holy aspirations; and walks in darkness, while he might rejoice in the light of the Lord.

4. The propriety of such a festival is inferred from the fact, that it has the sanction of divine authority. Our text affords the proof. No rule which Jehovah has laid down for the regulation of human conduct, under given circumstances, can, with propriety, be regarded as having ceased to be binding in its spirit, until the reason of that rule ceases. It is as right and proper that men should abstain from theft or covetousness, and that they should honor their parents, and remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, as when the law was given from Sinai. It is as right and proper that men should now do unto others, as they would that others should do to them, as it was when our Savior deliv-

ered the precept. The *reason* of the law remaining, determines the *perpetuity* of the law. Every *moral* law at least, is of perpetual obligation, and is binding under all circumstances of society. So in relation to any external religious observance, it having been once enjoined by divine authority, we may at least infer the *propriety* of its continuance, so long as the reason for that observance exists. So long therefore as seed time and harvest continue, and men are permitted to gather in the fruit of the earth, we may conclude that it is proper and suitable to their condition and circumstances, that they should keep a feast unto the Lord. It is on this principle of interpretation of the divine will, as disclosed in the sacred volume, that our pious ancestry established the usage of an annual thanksgiving.

II. Let us now attend for a moment to what seems to be implied in our text in regard to the *manner* in which it should be observed. And it is all implied in the direction that it should be kept *to the Lord*. It being spoken of as a feast, seems to imply a free and pleasant participation of the bounties of His providence, and that in this participation, they should be regarded as coming from his hand. No excess however is sanctioned by the idea of a feast. The passover and the Lord's Supper are properly denominated feasts. And they are institutions which from their nature preclude all excess or extravagance. A feast kept to the Lord necessarily implies the propriety of attendance on religious services, adapted to the nature of the occasion and its obvious design. That it may be kept *to the Lord*, it is necessary,

1. That there should be cherished a remembrance of His merciful providence, particularly in relation to the specified object of the festival; which is to celebrate the divine goodness in causing the fruits of the land to be gathered in, and thus continuing the means necessary for the preservation of social order and happiness. There is a strong liability in many to keep this festival to *themselves* rather than *to the Lord*. And not unfrequently it is entirely perverted from its original design, inasmuch as in the observance of it, the Lord is not regarded. By multitudes who feast upon the bounties of Providence, that Providence is wholly forgotten. Where the gratification of appetite and the excitement of mere animal pleasure are the principal or only objects kept in view, it is plainly evident, that persons regard *themselves* merely in the festival. In order that it be truly kept to the Lord, it is necessary that any excessive indulgence of appetite should be scrupulously avoided, because this is strictly forbidden under all circumstances. It moreover utterly disqualifies the soul for the rational and holy contemplation of the character, attributes and government of Jehovah.

2. That this festival may be kept to the Lord, it is further necessary that we should render unto Him thanksgiving and praise. This is a duty incumbent upon each individual, and must proceed from the heart. Public and social demonstrations of gratitude may be confined wholly to the outward form, while the heart has no share in them, and the soul is left unblest and joyless in view of the loving kindness of the Lord. But on this occasion, men are called upon especially to praise the Lord; to lift up the heart in thankfulness to Him who visiteth the earth, and watereth it, who maketh it soft with showers, and blesseth the springing thereof; who causeth the pastures to be clothed with flowers, and the valleys to be covered over with corn.

3. It is important, in order to a suitable and becoming observance of this occasion, that we should make a consecration to the Lord of ourselves and of those bounties of His providence, of which He condescends to make us his stewards. He rightfully demands that we present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to Him. And every act of religious worship and homage, every observance designed to commemorate His goodness and mercy towards ourselves, should lead us to cherish the dispositions which are pleasing in His sight. He exhibits himself not only as the object of supreme love and spiritual worship,—but as our high Exemplar in goodness and mercy, and truth and holiness. As He has not left himself without witness in that He does good to all, so He requires that they should be merciful even as their Father in heaven is merciful, and that they should never forget to do good and to communicate. What has any man that he has not received from the great Father of lights, the Giver of every good and perfect gift? And is not the earth the Lord's, and the fullness thereof? Is he not, by bestowing upon his creatures the means of subsistence and comfort, reminding them of their obligation to imitate his beneficence in proportion to the means put into their hands? While then on this occasion his own goodness to the children of men is celebrated, while they engage in public demonstrations of thankfulness and joy, in view of the divine munificence, displayed in crowning the year with plenty,—let them consider by what acts of benevolence,—what deeds of mercy,—what efforts to do good according to their several ability, they may honor the Lord with their substance, in administering to the necessities of others, in alleviating human wretchedness, in sustaining and advancing the institutions of religion, and in promoting the order and welfare of society. It may not always be expedient or practicable on this particular day, to deal thy bread to the hungry, to bring the poor into thy house, or to clothe the naked, but this joyous anniversary should

certainly be improved, for exciting and invigorating benevolent affections and for forming charitable designs and cultivating resolutions of extensive usefulness. The Lord demands this at our hands, that we should do whatever may be in our power to promote the advancement of his cause, to cherish and support the institutions which he has appointed and which are designed to bless mankind. And this surely, is an appropriate season for considering our obligations to an unreserved consecration of ourselves to the Lord.

In view of the subject, it becomes all to enquire whether this festival has been by them observed, in times past, agreeably to its original design, and to be humble and penitent in view of past ingratitude. Many such seasons may have passed away, without any suitable endeavors on our part, to secure the objects which ought to have been kept in view. Has it not been in too many instances regarded only as a day of feasting, while He, by whose beneficence our houses are filled with plenty, has been forgotten?

And may we not see how desirable it is, that we earnestly seek to come up to the measure of duty and gratitude implied in keeping a festival to the Lord? If this object is fully attained, it may well be regarded as a season of rejoicing. It should be made a festival of thanksgiving and praise to Him who orders the seasons in mercy, and who is ever well pleased with the grateful homage of his creatures. Well may we rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in the God of our salvation.

And while you praise the Lord for His goodness this year also,—enlarge your charities, and extend your benevolent regards over the wide field which is spread out before you. The field is the world. And it presents the objects which demand the exercise of your beneficence, that you may prove yourselves to be the children of Him who causes the sun to shine upon the evil and the good. They that are prepared to keep this festival to the Lord, will be prepared to enlarge, and not to circumscribe, within narrow limits, their efforts to do good. The institutions of religion are to be supported—the hungry to be fed, and the naked clothed. Nations are to be evangelized and reclaimed from the darkness of heathenism. The dark habitations of cruelty are to be enlightened and cheered with the Sun of Righteousness. And it is in the use of such means as Heaven in mercy imparts, that the truly thankful will evince their gratitude to God in deeds of benevolence to man.